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ABSTRACT

This articles explores authoritive problems in interpreting art education in research, namely authorization and authorship. Authorization rites and rights are now under institutional surveillance. A researcher should proceed with ethical fairness. The process of authorship is one of the negotiation of conflicting meanings, and at times subject to "overinterpretation" due to differences in theoretical traditions. Authority is rarely singular, especially after editorial review, and is actually a collective voice of experts and participants. In building an argument, a researcher can rely on different levels of authority: personal experience and expert opinion, dialogous consensus, and a polyphonic or triangulated interpretation. The latter types become more significant for a postmodern world. Authority, therefore, is a shared experience and responsibility. (KM)

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Problems in Interpreting Meaning in Multicultural Settings: Authority in Art Education

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Point of View: Empirical and Applied Research in Multicultural Settings
also fits under Politics of Multicultural Art Education

Problems in Interpreting Meaning in Multicultural Settings: Authority in Art Education

Interpretation is the pervasive process of understanding itself and involves cultural choices at all levels. Geertz (1973) warns that all ethnographic writing is a second or third level interpretation, because native sources are first order ones. Interpretation pervades all research and especially writing about art settings from the beginning of a study when a researcher chooses a site, a sample, a role, a methodology, a theoretical framework, collects certain data and ignores others, reduces the information into categories, and condenses the results for reporting (Stokrocki, 1990). Hidden within the process of interpretation is the power and problem of authority.

Unfortunately, research is now on trial (Holecheck, 1983). The crucial issue in anthropological research, for example, is "Who authors the cultural interpretation? Is the author the research scholar who wrote the article? The university for whom the scholar works? The participants who originated the observed actions/meanings? or The experts whose opinion the researcher evokes?

Authority

An authority is commonly regarded as a person or a group given power to command, such as the police or a judge. In education, authority is handed over to a group of teachers who determine actions, whose authority is further governed by overseers--a principal and/or superintendent. Their collective authority is monitored by higher officials--state superintendents. Their authority stems from a more hidden authoritative source--expert information. Some experts are self-proclaimed, basing information on experience, and others are acclaimed through their writing--a more formal sense of authority. All of the above have the power to influence.

The purpose of this article is to explore the more hidden cultural senses of authority--authorization and authorship in art education writing and research. Five modes of authority can also be identified: experiential, scientific, interpretive, and polyphonic (Derived from Clifford, 1988). In other words, an interpretation changes in meaning depending on the author and his/her theoretical and cultural tradition. Interpretations consists of different kinds and levels of authority.

Authorization

Authorization is a transfer of power which grants someone the freedom to do something. In the past, for example, research experiments could become hazardous to participants' health or infringe on their privacy. Researchers surveys or questionnaires often resulted in unclear meanings or contradictions. Students also were cajoled to cooperate in

research surveys or their grades would suffer.

Contemporary research procedures demand new authorization policies and protection of participants' rights. Most universities now have a Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, that decides whether a survey, questionnaire, photographs, or experiment can be conducted on minors or adults over 65 years of age. Allowed is:

> research on individual or group behavior or characteristics of individuals, such as studies of perception, cognition, game theory, or test development, where the research investigator does not manipulate subjects' behavior and the research will not involve stress to subjects" (University Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. (1990).

Application for review consists of copies of a survey, questionnaire, and signed release forms from participants. Where minors are involved, parental signature is sought. This process slows down the nonethical "hit-and-run" research of the 60's and 70's. Research authorization has become institutionalized.

Some Personal Problems with Acquiring Authorization

Ethnographers Smith and Lincoln (1990) are uncomfortable with ethical issues regarded authorization in real life situations. Lincoln finds that most social science research would fail Kant's imperatives or rules of validity: "Do unto others as one would so unto you (categorical) and "Treat everyone as an end in himself [herself] and never as a means only" (practical) (p. 292). I share their discomfort.

When I administer questionnaires in my research, I often interview participants informally because answers are so incomplete. Students do not take questionnaires seriously and I inevitably end up probing additional information from them. Informal interviews seem to work better because there is more personal interaction. If I take pictures, I always leave a set with the teacher or I xerox copies for students. In the past, I even sent copies of the research report to parents. In this way, I try to treat participants with dignity and fairness.

On the other hand, a institution at times demands publicity and prefers not to be anonymous as in my study of preschool children at the Cleveland Museum of Art (Stokrocki, 1984). Museum officials also reviewed the study and inserted their policies in my study.

On another occasion, my research was stopped by a teacher because she said that my tape recording made her troublesome sixth grade boys anxious. They thought that I might turn over the tapes to the administration. Later, she informed me that she was was threatened by my finding--she didn't want to "look bad." I lacked the authorization to continue the study.

Authorship

At the base of the concept of "authority," is the root word of "author"--the one who is the originator. As part of our post-colonial legacy, Clifford, (1988) questions who has the right to speak for a group's identity Research and writing over the past 10 years has shifted from highly distanced,

experimental representations of people as subjects to more empathetic, interpretive representations about people as participants. The latter research type consists of dialogues between researcher and natives in a give-and-take process. Marcus and Fisher (1986) regard this process as one of negotiation.

An Example of Conflicting Interpretations or Authorship

In the field of anthroplogy, contests of authorship became a legal issue when Freeman (1983) re-analyzed and critiqued Mead's classic Coming of Age in Samoa (1928/1949). Freeman discovered over 27 different versions of puberty rites. The results of such a confrontation were that findings in the social sciences are now considered more interpretative rather than scientifically precise. Nova (Holechek, 1983) also went to a small village in Papua, New Guinea to interview a young anthropologist John Barker in order to to find out how he and his participants were feeling about the experience. He writes, "We're used to having one version of history, but here there are twelve different clans each with its own history" p. 9).

In art education, I find that my research is often contested on sociological grounds, which is outside of my anthropological theoretical interpretive framework. For instance, if I describe a novice Puerto Rican elementary teacher's frustration with her Puerto Rican pupils, whom she calls "lazy" (Stokrocki, 1991a), she and I are accused of racial bias by review editors. Similarly, if a novice Anglo

teacher remarks that his primary Native American students are "wild," we are accused of prejudice (Stokrocki, 1991b). Whereas review editors often offer helpful comments, they occasionally "overreact and overinterpet" findings from a different theoretical framework. Pyschological reports of frustration are important because we all share them daily. Such reports are the most significant finding in the lives of novice teachers. Class differences are present, so I now include social class differences as the limits of my research method.

Authorship is Rarely Singular

Authority exists on several levels and can hardly be regarded as singular. In writing on women's issues in art education, Korzenik (1990) writes about historical research and unconsiously about <u>personal authority</u>:

> We are the authority, deciding what goes in and what stays out. Writer's choices reveal private preoccupations, and biases seep through everywhere, resulting in the truism: A history is as much about its publication year as it is about the time that is its subject" (p.49).

When Korzenik speaks of herself and her writing, her authority is credible, as she critiques and reveals her personal and cultural bias--her unconscious omission of the story of the Cross wife and sister in her book <u>Drawn to Art</u> (1986).

Authority, however, is wider than Korzenik describes. Because she was an official research gatekeeper (editor for

Studies in Art Education), she overlooks the fact that editors can change the nature of authority in writing. When she speaks collectively, then the matter is wider. The plural authority (the vague "we" in her above quote) invites differences of opinion and refutation.

The Editorial Negotiation of Meaning or Collective Authority

The editorial review process consists of the negotiation of meaning--the process of discussing and conferring points to settle a matter or the sense of a thing. My intent in an article is sometimes not clear enough for reviewers. As a review editor myself, I realize that sometimes I misunderstand what an author is arguing and he/she has the opportunity to clarify a point. Some editorial comments are helpful clarifications and others are petty criticisms. A negotiation of points and arguments ensues. No research paper ever sails through editorial review without some changes. The resulting report is a synthesis of several opinions and the final result is a different version.

For example, a phenomenological paper that I wrote about preschool teaching was first rejected by editors from one journal because the examples were not explained with scientific concepts or theory. At the time, there was no abstract concept for the phenomenon of "touching." An abstract scientific discourse would destroy the original qualities and flavor of this preschool experience and the resulting report could hardly be understood by preschool parents. When reviewers reject a phenomenological

interpretation of an experience, they fail to respect the natives' viewpoints. Fortunately another journal accepted the "naive" language and interpretation. [Naive doesn't imply inferior.] The review process consists of the negotiation of such "academic dialects" (Hamblen 1986).

Modes of Authority

Clifford (1988) described five modes of authority used in anthropology that can be applied to art education. Since anthroplogical research is a study of people and art is made or conceived by people, then these modes of authority can be applied to art education research as well. These modes of authority are experiential, scientific, interpretive, dialogical, and polyphonic (p. 67). To this list I have added connoiseurship.

In the past, the researcher was typically regarded as a hero, and experience was the first criteria of authority. In art education, Lowenfeld's early writing (1952) was mainly based on his experience, added to by Brittain (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1964/70/75), and documented by Michael (1982). Thus, an art education legacy is born. With the advent of the scientific method, university-trained scholars gained respect. Experimental studies of perception dominated the field for over 10 years (Wilson, 1966; Lovano, 1970; Salome, 1965; and McFee, 1961). McFee's authority inspired many University of Oregon researchers to study socio/cultural influences as well (McFee & Degge, 1975). Her status can be compared to Mead's (1928/49). Eisner (1991) further elevated

the scientific tradition to the level of connoiseurship. Even though his research is qualitative, a description of intersubjective meaning, he still claims final authority, based on his professional expertise. We never learn about his subjects' opinions about his research findings.

Beittel (1973) argued for alternative modes of research and authority. His cooperative documentations of creative activity in the drawing lab can be considered the beginning of **dialogous** research. In this study, a three-way questionning between the two researchers and an artist occurred. A dialogue is a conversation, wherein results are cooperatively achieved. This dialogue continued in the 20 dissertations and theses that have been written on Beittel's teaching. Each study is a different interpretation--a dialogous translation of teaching activity (Wilson, 1974; Stokrocki, 1982, to name a few). Other dialogues are Mason's (1980) study of her painting teacher/mentor and Brook's (1981) self examination and dialogue with herself as artist and as teacher.

Research may contain authority that is **polyphonic**--built upon several indigenous interpretations. Art educators use this polyphonic authority when they conduct a survey or quote related findings to support their arguments. MacGregor and Gray (1987), for instance, conducted ethnographic surveys and observations of art teachers and their expectations in their collaborative project called PROACTA. Stokrocki (1991b) and her two graduate students are conducting a triangulated study

of the teaching of art in one Navajo public school sytem. The dialogue continues with art teachers on three levels and between Anglo and Navajo teachers. A final example is an on-going attempt by Stokrocki (1990/1991) an her graduate students to interpret one of her videos conducting from their viewpoints.

Conclusion

This paper discussed authoritive problems in interpreting art education in research, namely authorization and authorship. Authorization rites and rights are now under institutional surveillance. A researcher should procede with ethnical fairness and dignity, publicity if demanded, and at times, the abandonment of the project, if necessary. The process of authorship is one of the negotiation of conflicting meanings, and at times subject to "overinterpretation" due to differences in theoretical traditions. Authority is rarely singular, especially after editorial review, and is actually a collective voice of experts and participants. In building an argument, a researcher can rely on different levels of authority: personal experience and expert opinion, dialogous consensus, and a polyphonic or triangulated interpretations. The latter types becoming more significant for a postmodern world.

Researchers, including evaluators, must assume responsibility for writing about people in ways that are not abusive and are understandable to them, giving them credit for their cooperation and including their reflections in

conclusions. After all, they are the teachers and the informants, and authority thus becomes dialogic. Researchers are also indebted to take action to correct problems and to give back to participants something they take away. Research is a collective form and becomes a form of negotiating meaning during its long review process. Clifford (1988) suggests that if researchers manage to positively contaminate the instruction or influence the conditions being studied, then they have succeeded. Such influence is reciprocal, because researchers are also changed. Authority thus becomes a shared experience and responsibility.

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